

Idaho Employment First Consortium

May 22, 2014 Meeting Notes

Monique shared about the barriers identified with the Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities (MWD) program. There are issues at the point in time when an individual comes to an IDHW Self Reliance office seeking eligibility and they are referred to Social Security. They should be notified that they don't have to apply for SSI, but can get an application for developmental disability services (DDS). See her handout. She recommends that the rule be changed (in plain language) to improve process.

The second barrier is that people are told they make too much money for Medicaid and they are denied. Recommendation that this is a training issue. Training is happening outside of the system, but needs to happen internally with Dept. of Health and Welfare staff. State Independent Living Council staff and Disability Rights Idaho staff have tried to offer to be part of the training of IDHW staff but it has been difficult. Jean mentioned that there has been turnover in administration at the Westgate office so it might be a good time to approach them again.

The next recommendation is to create an oversight committee. Interface with the Idaho Home Choice group. Monique reported that Robbi Barrutia at the SILC is committed to making something happen on these issues with MWD.

Lori shared that their clients have experienced the same barriers/issues. Jean suggested we might want to **invite Julie Hammon** from the Medicaid Westgate office come to a meeting to share how their training is being implemented and help her see the barriers identified. Invite her in a way that expresses our desire to understand the process as a resource in our work to change the perception of PWDD. **Tracy will send Jean an email** that she will share with Julie.

Scott shared that there is also an issue with the DDS application process itself. He knows people have been denied for MWD. One client was denied because her SSI case had been terminated because of an out of date medical review. Because the SSI case was closed it was seen as an automatic denial.

Gordon provided a report on the Dept. of Labor activities with the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant. Disability Resource Coordinators have been engaged in events in the focus area. DOL is at the final stages of becoming an employment network under Ticket to Work. DEI staff met with the Sun Valley Resort human resources staff to describe what they are doing and to see what jobs are done at the resort.

DOL is working to update the *Willing and Able* guide booklet. Monique suggested they include a mention of the Able to Work website.

DEI Disability Resource Coordinators have been working in the Council and Cascade School Districts including taking students on a tour of Shore Lodge and golf course to experience the different jobs. During their lunch with students at Tollhouse Pizza the owner, just off the cuff, talked about working and expectations for work and provided applications to students. Students then spent the afternoon and the local DOL office having workshops. Also did workshops with English classes. June 9-11 they are doing a Ready Set Go camp for students from Gooding in collaboration with Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and Blind (IESDB) at College of Southern Idaho and the Twin Falls DOL office.

Debbie Larson attended the meeting to represent Idaho Parents Unlimited (IPUL) and she shared about her work related to Response to Intervention (RTI) and their recent Parent Leadership Development training in East Idaho. IPUL holds webinars on specific topics each month. They serve parents with children up to the age of 26 and some young adults. In June they are holding a training at the IPUL office on parent advocacy for their children.

Gordon shared that congress has a new bill that would reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. It is called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It eliminates 15 programs and includes metrics and requirements for a strategic plan for agencies involved, among other things. It doesn't place Vocational Rehabilitation under the Dept. of Labor. Here is a link to the full text of the bill:

http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/wioa_sa_hr803.pdf

Summary from NCWD-Youth: *The bill aims to promote positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities by requiring vocational rehabilitation programs to develop "individual employment plans" and mandates that states use at least 15 percent of vocational rehabilitation funding to support students while they are still transitioning out of school. Additionally, the bill imposes restrictions on when youth ages 24 or younger can be employed in a sheltered employment setting; they must first be provided with pre-employment transition services and have applied for vocational rehabilitation and either be found ineligible, or if eligible, have an individualized plan for employment and have been working toward employment outcomes specified in the plan with appropriate supports and services, including supported employment services for a reasonable period of time without success.*

Jean and Cassie shared about the Community Supported Employment exception review rules development and recent negotiated rulemaking meeting. A communication plan is under development with information for plan developers, Targeted Service Coordinators, and others. Howard said that Vocational Rehabilitation is very excited about the collaboration and partnership between VR and Medicaid and creating joint processes. They feel it will have an impact on the waitlist for services.

Jean mentioned the court finding that requires Medicaid to reinstate individual's budgets to the pre-2011 level. This may allow some individuals to use their current budget for services to support employment without having to do an exception review.

Gordon shared about the *Guideposts for Success* related to the DEI grant activities and a recent site visit. He handed out the Resource Mapping Tool – a description of the tool and its uses as well as a chart showing the tool elements.

Allison, Tracy, and Jacque shared about the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) capacity building institute and the plan developed by the Idaho team that attended. Goal: increase the post school outcomes of students working with families to better facilitate the transition process. Strategies are aimed at helping families have higher expectations for their children to work.

Debbie shared IPUL discussions with parents about what their expectations are for their children during the IEP meeting. Many do not think about their children going to college, working, or even graduating. Monique talked about working with parents early.

Alison showed the plan and some of the activities/tasks identified. One task is to update the Colorado “Connections” curriculum and she has funds from the SDE to pay someone to work on it. It is for 3rd through 6th grade. The team also identified that middle school and the development of the student 4-year learning plan is a point in time to engage parents and better relate the Student Learning Plan to post-school goals. Need to engage school counselors in the process because they are responsible for conducting career interest inventories, vocational assessments, and having students/parents involved in the development of the plan. Jacque said there is a packet related to the development of the SLP that was developed when rules were passed. It lives under Professional Technical Education. Career interest inventories and assessments should be appropriate so that students with significant needs are not left out of this process. University of Oklahoma is developing some things for students with disabilities. May also be used with adults.

In September, regional trainings will be offered to teachers/teams in districts around the state providing information on improving post-school outcomes for students. Breakout sessions on employment, vocational rehabilitation, and college readiness.

How do we address the issue that schools don’t want to have the transition discussion and planning until the student turns 16 years of age? Leverage the fact that Idaho statute and rule requires the development of the parent-approved learning plan at middle school age. Alison acknowledged that parents are the ones that can make change. We need to inform parents and build their expectations.

Data Collection

How do we work with the data we already have? Can we pull the data from different agencies together in a related way? Data analysis and linking it together. Data is gathered by different agencies at a different point in time.

Jacque said there was an agreement between SDE, VR and IDHW in the past. Where the different groups dumped their data in and the identifying information was stripped. Could we see the framework? Called TARTAR? Who housed it maybe IDHW?

How could we gather funding to make it happen? Tracy said that at the non-profit conference in recent years she attended a session by a BSU professor who taught classes on data analysis and different ways of reporting information. She will see if she can find his name. Shannon will attend a national Vocational Rehabilitation conference in the fall and she could talk with folks who are doing data collection.

Look at Montana Rural Institute and Delaware – recommendations by Curtis Richards. Would the Institute for Community Inclusion have any grants to figure out how to analyze data and put something together – UMass or UConn? Would the Promise grants have anything like this happening?

Howard will create a short description of what we would like to accomplish with our data collection/analysis to share with folks we contact to get advice. Jacque will follow up with Transcen.

The Human Partnerships conference is scheduled for Oct 30-31 and Cary Griffin will be providing a keynote and several sessions on Discovery and Customized Employment. There is an IDVR in-service conference scheduled for Oct 28-29 in addition to the State Rehabilitation Council meeting. Make sure the Rehabilitation Council is looped into communication about the conference and other trainings etc.

Public Forums Report

Noll provided the final report from the Employment Public Forums he conducted around the state (see handout). The group discussed public feedback about issues with the quality of direct support staff. There were comments on the lack of training for job developers/employment specialists and job coaches. There is also quite a bit turnover in these positions. How do we create value and a level of professionalism so these jobs are seen as professions and not just short term jobs?

Training at a point in time is good, but how do we sustain training and deep development of philosophy and techniques? Also need to look at the individual employment plan developed during the VR process and directions from VR Counselor for services to be provided and how. Concern that there is not a standard out there for what can be done in job development. Relates back to importance to do more at transition-age.

Discussion about having training requirements but it is not supported with funding. Not having providers go “in the hole” to provide training to staff. Also need to see this as a profession and ongoing professional development to keep up skills. Other professionals invest in their own skills/training. It may also relate to level of earnings in professions.

What about self-direction? What are the negotiated rates there? Trina answered between \$11 and \$14 per hour.

Wrap up from forums report: Noll said he learned that in the future he would not depend on email as much and would call local coordinators about bringing self-advocates to the forum. Lori recommended going to the people where groups are because transportation is difficult.

Family Page on Able to Work Website

Monique shared some content she found on a different organizations website. We could use this if we send what we plan to use to the organization and give them credit. Monique will email the file of possible content to Alison and Tracy to review and make edits then it will be sent to IEFC members for feedback – please respond by the first week in June. **Tracy will send email after edits.**

Discussion with Nanna Hanchett – Vocational Rehabilitation Process

Issue 1: Determination that an individual is unable to benefit from services.

If this has been determined due to significance of disability - put person into extended evaluation or trial work. Before final decision is made. Extended evaluation = Counselor uses a variety of things to determine if individual is eligible including extended amount of documentation – not just one report - and includes data over an extended time. Also applies if an individual cannot access traditional evaluation methods. Trial work is another method and can be part of application process. Someone can be found eligible but later be found ineligible because of the significance of disability, are unable to stabilize, or their condition has gotten worse.

Trial Work – when there is a belief that an individual may not be able to benefit. There is a plan for different activities to further evaluation. Not intended for training or employment purposes. Can last a varying amount of time. With or without accommodations.

Advocacy methods – contact regional manager when there is concern about the validity of the determination based on limited information. VR tracks closure reasons.

Ineligibility is different than a case being closed for a specific reason. There are times when a case may be closed for other reasons – during application – most closures. Transportation, lack of participation, lack of documentation. A file must be closed within 60 days – RSA regulation – compliance issue. Can do an extension if customer communicates there is a lag in getting the information needed. Shannon reported that file reviews show that Vocational Rehabilitation

Counselors (VRCs) are going above and beyond in trying to make sure that individuals are given every opportunity in the process.

Is there a timeline for the period between application and when services begin? There are evaluation services (determine need for and amount of services to go in plan) and plan services (achievement of a goal). An evaluative service has to be justified by VRC and documented. Except trial work - that is separate.

Scott was concerned that a referral to have benefits analysis during the process might hold up the process in either evaluation or plan services. Nanna explained that it is individualized depending on the individual's concerns, but can move forward with other parts of evaluation and plan development while waiting for information.

VRCs are required to provide clients with information as encouragement, but can't require clients to do it.

Recommend that individuals talk to their VRC when confused about process or concerned about how decisions are being made. If you have tried that, then go to regional manager if needed. Most issues can be resolved at regional level.

Assignments to VRCs based on that local office, number of counselors available. Mostly by schedule and there are some unofficial specialties based on individual VRC knowledge and experience.

VRC Master Degree programs have strong components on disabilities and functional limitations and ties it to work. Not sure about customized employment techniques and if there has been training. Sometimes use Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs).

Referral to Extended Employment Services waitlist. VR program is separate from the EES program - both are housed in IDVR but completely separate. VR staff do communicate about the EES program but are not responsible for its operation or oversight - Howard does that and he determines eligibility for the program. Common practice is that the VRC considers EES as an option related to filling an individual's need for long term supports. If customer feels they may not need long term supports that should be discussed with the VRC.

During evaluation process the determination for need for long term supports is made. The majority of people who choose not to have a VR case opened for themselves is when they know they need long term supports that have not been identified. If there is any doubt for the need for long term supports then evaluation should move forward.

Another issue can be that if long term supports are not secured earlier in the process, then the customer might be devastated that they are not able to continue going to work when VR job coaching must end. VR cannot be long term supports. Length of VR job coaching is individualized but based on when the individual

becomes stable – that is when transition to long term supports. What is considered stabilization? Long term supports can look very different – Lori shared example of time needed to save money for PASS plan to pay for more job coaching. Services need to meet certain criteria – example your cousin can't be your VR funded job coach just because. Confirmation of long term support needs to be in writing – whatever it is.

Suggestion was made to provide training for Support Brokers about using VR while on self-direction. At the end of VR services employment support is added to the individual's service plan.

Need to be aware that sometimes the employer may not be open to the idea of a change in job coaching staff (VR to CSE funded staff - if there is a change).

The role of an Employment Network in the VR process. At the time that employment is gained VR shares information about employment networks. Just implemented in February so taking time to get ramped up. If someone assigns Ticket to an entity other than VR... Scott said he would be willing to provide a future presentation on Ticket to Work.

Issue 2: Soft Caps on VR Services

The soft caps are defined in the VR policy manual. If you need services that go beyond soft cap, the VRC needs to get additional approval. Soft caps are allowed for in regulations (fee schedule to assist in the administration of the program). Depends on service – caps on different categories. Caps are to ensure a check-in for quality and appropriateness of services.

Determination of stabilization so that more VR supported employment can be provided. It is about communication between customer and VRC and manager if needed. Stabilization looks different for everyone – looks like leveled supports (the needs for support has leveled out). How do we advocate for more time during the stabilization process? More hours could be approved by manager.

Nanna can provide more awareness for managers around soft caps issue and better communication. Shannon suggested that folks encourage individuals to complete their VR survey after closure.

Discussion about using PASS plans and awareness. Scott can share more information later for those who would like it. Also can go to the SSA.gov website for information.

Does VR have an FAQ or similar information on their website? How can we provide general information so individuals approaching VR better understand services and the purposes of the services? VR needs to be able to justify something as a needed service/purchase, etc. Example of a request to VR for training/college tuition costs for programs – VR looks at in-state program and will pay for reasonable amount (\$2000 versus \$18,000 program).

June meeting agenda items:

TYLTW Awareness and Materials

Meet in August – early to mid, so think about dates.

Next meeting is scheduled for June 20, 2014.